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Secretarial Paper

Changing Methods but an Abiding Purpose
of the
American Missionary Association

CHARLES J. RYDER
Corresponding Secretary

DISTRICT OFFICES

Eastern District
615 Congregational House
Boston, Mass.

Pacific District
21 Brenham Place
San Francisco, Ill.

Western District
19 South La Salle Street
Chicago, Ill.

Changing Methods but an Abiding Purpose of the American Missionary Association.

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It is rather an amusing fact and withal somewhat suggestive, that the minister or teacher new in a given field detects many mistakes of his predecessor. This fact is illustrated in other avocations but more particularly in those of the pulpit and schoolroom. As Dr. Jefferson presents this tendency in his book on "The Building of a Church," we have the following: "They begin at once to reorganize it. They set out before breakfast to make it all over, nothing about it suits them. The Sunday-school is on a wrong basis. The Young People's Society has faulty methods. The W. M. C. has an antiquated constitution. Even the Cradle Roll must have a new set of by-laws. All these changes must be made immediately." In the development of a great philanthropic enterprise like that of the American Missionary Association, the temptation comes to each succeeding generation to imagine that they and they alone are the wise and far-seeing agencies of the work. This is especially true of those who have not passed through great crises which their predecessors encountered. In the treatment of the Negro problem it is so easy to say that the ballot should never have been given to the black man of the South. Sitting in the comfortable library of the Twentieth Century it is a simple matter to criticise those whose judgment and action were compelled by conditions of battle or the terrible exigencies of protracted warfare. It is by no means a self-evident proposition that the Negroes should not have been given the ballot. The great body of loyal men in the South were black men when the war closed. The Negroes were never disloyal, never betrayed the flag, never sought to disrupt the nation nor to destroy its peace. Those who extended the ballot to the Negro conferred the right upon those who were ignorant to be sure, but upon those who had been loyal to the heart's core through all the struggle for the disruption of the nation.

So criticism is easily at hand against the "carpetbag regime." No one would at this stage justify the corruption and vulgarities that came in this reconstruction period. We must remember, however, that the exceeding poverty had been brought about by those who precipitated the war. It must also be borne in mind that the ignorance of the

Negroes was not the fault of the reconstruction period nor of the Negro, but the fault of those who had brought them up in this ignorant state. It must be borne in mind that in some states at least the whole public school system was inaugurated by those who represented this period of reconstruction, the carpetbaggers.

It is by no means the purpose of this paper to justify the wrongs that have taken place in any period. It is only to call attention to the fact which is too often neglected, that those who have wrought out that which we have, often struggle in the midst of perplexing, difficult and staggering conditions. Methods adopted were the best that those under such conditions could formulate. It is so easy to say that we of this generation are simply coming to the real and considerate settlement of these problems.

Certain specific claims are frequently put forth which will not bear historic analysis. How often we hear it said that our missionary societies are at last coming to cordial, fraternal relation; that the irritations of the past are vanishing and that the executive boards, prudential committees, secretaries and treasurers, are at last uniting for the furtherance of the Kingdom and for the promotion of the interests of the whole body. But such have been the purpose and the habits of the societies in their boards and officers for many years, as I know. Regular meetings of secretaries and executive committees were held in the times of Dr. Smith, Dr. Strieby, Dr. Clark, Dr. Cobb and Dr. Clapp. As a junior officer in those days, I remember well these gatherings which were frequent, frank, open, manly and deeply spiritual. No new Daniel has come to judgment in these latter days. We of this century of opportunity do not need to criticise the memory of those who have gone before or for one moment to imagine that we are working out grave and serious problems from which they shrank or ineffectively administered upon. We have the heritage of their achievements, mighty and grand. We stand on a height of opportunity which they did not reach, but we stand there by climbing on their shoulders. A self-satisfied confidence and assertiveness which sometimes finds expression even in public print, is unwarranted.

But this is only the half truth. Knowledge has enlarged. Modern instrumentalities are at our hand. We can forge ahead and adopt new methods and thus add to our efficiency. If it is unbecoming to us, as it is, to ridicule the earlier methods or to speak disrespectfully of them, it is also unworthy of us servilely to confine ourselves to those methods. In our treatment of the race problem which involves twenty million brown-skinned people in our body politic, each race and each individual in a sense representing a race of retarded progress,

we can not surrender a single point already gained. To exclude from their rights those who, under the constitution and laws are entitled to vote, because they are not of the dominant race is cowardice. A test of education or property may be necessary. It must be administered, however, impartially with no favoritism along race lines. This is not a reference to political conditions alone, but to moral, intellectual and religious. No race is safe that oppresses another race or takes from it certain privileges that belong to it simply because it is of a different race. Booker Washington's comparison is always true, "You can not keep another man in the ditch without staying down there with him." To exclude another race from the privileges that legally belong to that race is an impeachment to the white race. The greatest injustice is done by such acts to the white race. They prove themselves untrue to the high ideals and cowards in racial competition. There is as much need to stand for this wholesome principle of honesty and equality as there ever has been and the heroic fathers of this Association were right and sound in their ethics and philosophy.

AN ABIDING PURPOSE.

What is the fundamental and abiding purpose of the American Missionary Association? History, the record of the Association's life, answers this question. The declaration of the men who organized the Association left in its Constitution the purpose of its organization. The Second Article of this Constitution, and I like to refer to it again and again, reads as follows: "The object of this Association shall be to conduct Christian, missionary and educational operations and to diffuse a knowledge of the Holy Scripture in our own country and other countries which are destitute of them or which present open and urgent fields of effort."

Let us note some of the significant features of this early declaration. These operations were to be missionary-educational. There was no patent method proposed for the quick recovery from sin or the building of Christian character. It was Christian-missionary-educational operations that must receive support and development. The leaven hidden in the lump in accordance with the teaching of the Master's own parable could not at once leaven the whole lump. Its process was a gradual one. So of this Constitution of the A.M.A. which was indeed a prophecy of the future, there were no hints that short cuts could be taken in the accomplishment of this great work. The years have passed since 1846 when this Association was born, but these years have only emphasized the wisdom of the fathers in their

ideal statements. The introduction of various new methods of education have marked great development and progress in this means of uplift and regeneration. Industrial Training has been included. It is to the honor of this Association that it was the first to introduce this form of education in the South. Talladega College first used this method of instruction in shop and farm work in 1867. This only emphasizes the Christian-mission-educational work. We can not separate between the mission and the school. The school is a mission and the mission is a school if it meet the needs of the retarded races or indeed of any races.

The church is only an educational institution in the highest sense. It is a mistaken view that the church work is missionary and the school work simply educational. The whole life, organization and purpose, of this Association is to deny any such artificial division. Let us glance a moment at the churches in the South. In Washington, D. C., three Congregational churches exist composed largely of colored people under the leadership of Negro pastors. These churches are the centers of spiritual power, but they are also great educational institutions. In two of them at least there is a dispensary under the care of qualified medical direction. They minister not only to the physical need but to the intellectual development of classes taught in them.

These churches have established missions in the portions of the city where white and black, poor or criminal mingle together. But these missions are schools; boys and girls are gathered from the streets and instructed. It would be artificial and misleading to seek to differentiate between the educational value of these churches and the distinctive spiritual value. It is to the honor of the American Missionary Association that this has never been done. It would indeed be a pity if anything like rivalry were introduced between the church organization and the school in any community of the South or West.

Here stands the First Congregational Church of Atlanta, Ga., an imposing building erected by the faithful and tireless efforts of its pastor, Dr. H. H. Proctor, and furnishing comprehensive facilities for physical, intellectual and spiritual development of the people. Here is a ward of a hospital for emergency treatment; there a gymnasium; a girls' class in sewing gathers here; a mothers' circle meets in this room so affecting and uplifting the domestic conditions of the whole city of Atlanta. The work of this church is educational as truly as that of Atlanta or Fisk University.

Another case illustrates the impossibility and unwisdom of seeking to divide between the educational and church work. At Wilming-

ton, N. C., Gregory Institute stands an honor to the city. The money by which it was planted was given by Mr. Gregory, a devoted New Englander, who desired to establish a plant which should accomplish the largest results in the uplift of the Negroes of that city and state of North Carolina. The condition of the gift was that there should be a church, a school and a teachers' home. They were not antagonistic nor different in their purposes. It was to develop the young people spiritually and religiously and educationally and intellectually, to give them the best type of a Christian home so that the largest possible results would be secured in their development. We greatly mistake and are in danger of introducing an unwelcome conception if we rigidly separate between the educational work which is done through the church and that which is done through the school. The school is the center of great religious power and the church is the center of important educational operations. They are one and not two.

Some years ago at the Annual Meeting of this Association a very interesting paper was presented by a prominent layman of Brooklyn. This paper was a plea for time as a necessary condition for the development of a strong race. The author of the paper said: "Give the Negro time to have a grandfather before you judge him severely." An interesting comparison between the descendants of a criminal by the name of Jukes—who was cotemporaneous with Jonathan Edwards—and the descendants of Jonathan Edwards is of especial interest right here. Twelve hundred descendants of Jukes have been located. Of these 7 were murderers; 60 thieves; 300 had been inmates of alms houses; few had done useful work in the world and many were actually a burden or a danger to society. So much for the heredity of criminals.

In the Edwards family 1400 descendants had been identified and located. With scarcely an exception they were men and women of high character and of great usefulness. Among them 300 were college graduates; 12 college presidents; almost every one occupied a position of honor and influence and their work had been constructive in the upbuilding of society.

The Negroes of this generation are inheriting the weaknesses of both white and black men who lived during the times of slavery and whose blood often mingles in their veins. We must give the Negro "time to have a grandfather"—I say again. In the mean time he and we together are directing the forces which tend to develop the sort of grandfather that any race needs. It is physical, intellectual and moral qualities which this Association is seeking to develop through

its various lines of institutional effort, churches, schools, farms, shops and homes.

To build character; strong, intellectual and moral, is the abiding purpose of the American Missionary Association and has been from the very inception of the work and must be to the end.

Rev. John Brierly in the volume entitled "Eternal Religion" gives the one essential secret upon which the progress of humanity depends. He says: "The supreme conflict in life is not to displace evil with good; it is to displace the good with the better and the better with the best." This the American Missionary Association is seeking to do in these great mission fields. Evil has been largely displaced with Good. The struggle is on now to displace the Good with the Better. The vision of the future is to displace the Better with the Best.